Science Serving Human Needs

BATTELLE

The Story of Batelle Labs

The man central to the story of the Batelle Institute is Gordon Batelle -- a man who possessed amazing foresight and believed in the usefulness of scientific research. In death, and by his will, he gave life to the Institute. Gordon Batelle died in 1923, leaving a will which provided that the bulk of his estate be used to create "a Batelle Memorial Institute...for the encouragement of creative research...and the making of discoveries and inventions." The Institute was to serve as a memorial to his family -- pioneers in Ohio and in its early steel industry.

Two years later (1925), Gordon's mother, Annie Norton Battelle, died and left the balance of the Battelle family fortune to the same purpose, making the total a sum of about $3.5 million -- an impressive, although not awesome amount even by 1925 standards.

In 1925 the board of trustees acquired a site of about 10 acres in Columbus, Ohio and carried out plans for a laboratory which was built and opened for use in October, 1929. Equally important, the board chose a director, Dr. Horace Gillett, who was considered by his peers "The Dean of American Metallurgy."

Dr. Gillett in 1934 asked the trustees to relieve him of administrative duties and to name Clyde Williams

SCIENCE SERVING
From page 29

as director. To Dr. Gillett, who had a distaste for administrative duties, it was the beginning of a renewed freedom to pursue his scientific interests. To Williams, it was not so much the realization of an ambition as it was the accepting of a challenge. Faced with an industrial world that was, at best, apathetic to the potentialities of applied science, Williams resolved that if industry would not come to science, he would take science to industry.

One example of Battelle's efforts to broaden its capabilities was in nuclear research. The Institute became involved in the "Manhattan Project" of World War II because of its international reputation in the field of metallurgy, and was asked to study the fabrication of the then almost unknown metal uranium. In the next decade, Battelle became one of the country's outstanding centers for nuclear research, and at times, over 400 of its staff members were engaged in research in this area. Thus, in the early 50's, Battelle purchased a large tract of land at West Jefferson, just west of Columbus, and built what was the first privately owned nuclear research center in the world, including a research reactor, critical assembly facility, and hot cells.

In the early 50's, the Institute built research centers in Frankfurt, Germany, and Geneva, Switzerland. Establishing the Geneva Laboratories and Battelle-Institut e.V. (Frankfurt) was in itself a daring experiment, but both quickly became self-sustaining operations, bringing to Europe the concept of sponsored research.

For Battelle, the years following World War II constituted a period of amazing growth. Thus, in 1957, at the time of Williams' retirement, the total worldwide Battelle staff stood at 3100 and total annual research expenditures were just over $25 million.

Williams's retirement, and the appointment of his longtime associate. Dr. B.D. Thomas, as president, coincided closely with a dramatic shift in science policy in the U.S. and elsewhere in the world. It was in the fall of 1957 that the Soviet Union launched the first man-made satellite signaling what came to be called the Space Age or the Space Race. Battelle was actively involved in a number of facets of the space program, and emphasis on national leadership in science was reflected in the further growth and diversity of the Institute.

Other facilities, as well, were added by Battelle during Dr. Thomas's years as president. In the fall of 1964, the Institute assumed responsibility for the management and operation of the William F. Clapp Laboratories in Duxbury, Massachusetts. Long noted as a world center for the study of marine biological attack on materials, the Clapp Laboratories complemented the Institute's Florida Marine Research Facility that Battelle had established near Daytona Beach in 1946. And, later in the 60's, Battelle was to acquire 2 other coastal research facilities. In 1965, the Institute purchased a 120-acre site at the mouth of Sequim Bay in the State of Washington for a marine research facility, and in early 1968 began construction of Battelle's Ocean Engineering Research Facility at Long Beach, Cal. The Long Beach Facility was closed in 1975 after it became apparent that the much-heralded boom in ocean-engineering research had not materialized.

Today Battelle is a large organization with many facets and with a wide range of interests and activities. Its purpose, however, is simple and constant -- the use of science, technology and education to meet human needs. We hope, and we believe, that this purpose shows clearly in all that we, as an organization, do and aspire to do, for it is to this central idea that we are dedicated.

In recent years, Battelle has annually conducted some 3,000 studies for companies, government agencies, and associations based in literally dozens of countries. Thus, space does not permit anything like a complete listing of the thousands and thousands of studies carried out by the Institute during its first 50 years. On the other hand, no history of the Institute would be complete without some attention to Battelle's research achievements.